

Abbreviated Articles

'Freedom Convoy,' police face off near U.S.-Canada border crossings as Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act

Washington Post, Ellen Francis and Andrew Jeong, 15 February 2022

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Baffled by the Chaos in Canada? So Are Canadians.

New York Times, Catherine Porter, 14 February 2022

It seemed a classically Canadian moment in a scene otherwise torn from the book of Trump America.

Canada's Trudeau Invokes Emergency Powers to Address Trucker Protests

Wall Street Journal, Paul Vieira and Kim Mackrael, 14 February 2022

In a highly unusual move, the Canadian government on Monday invoked a series of emergency powers that include limits on public gatherings in a bid to end disruptive demonstrations in the capital city and along the Canada-U.S. border.

Fact check: Canadian government didn't place rock-filled bins to incite violence at trucker protest

USA Today, McKenzie Sadeghi, 14 February 2022

The claim: The Canadian government planted dumpsters full of rocks to incite violence during COVID-19 demonstrations

Canada's trucker blockade is a right-wing fantasy made real

MSNBC, Ryan Cooper, 14 February 2022

On Sunday, the Ambassador Bridge on the U.S.-Canada border between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, was reopened after a weeklong protest, in which a handful of right-wing fanatics had been blocking the bridge and holding up some \$355 million in goods in protest against a vaccine mandate for the trucking industry.

Canada tries to block funding for illegal border protests against Covid-19 rules with sweeping new financial measures

CNN, Kelly McCleary and Holly Yan, 15 February 2022

Canada has invoked the country's Emergencies Act for the first time ever in an attempt to sever financial support for protesters' costly blockades at US border crossings over Covid-19 mandates.

Canada PM Justin Trudeau slammed for invoking emergency powers to stop protests

NY Post, Yaron Steinbuch, 15 February 2022

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been criticized by several civil liberties groups and politicians for invoking emergency powers to stop the protests across the country against COVID-19 restrictions.

Vigils planned at Canadian embassies in US to protest imprisonment of pastor who preached to Freedom Convoy

Fox News, Jon Brown, 15 February 2022

Supporters of a Canadian pastor who has spent the past week in a maximum-security Calgary prison after speaking to members of the Freedom Convoy have organized vigils at various Canadian consulates in the United States to protest his treatment Tuesday.

Full Articles

'Freedom Convoy,' police face off near U.S.-Canada border crossings as Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act

Washington Post, Ellen Francis and Andrew Jeong, 15 February 2022

Canadian police tried to clear protesters near crossings at the U.S.-Canada border, making arrests as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the country's Emergencies Act on Monday.

Standoffs between police and protesters in Coutts, Alberta, and Surrey, B.C., persisted overnight after authorities had earlier reopened the Ambassador Bridge, the busiest land border crossing and a key trade artery connecting Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit.

Trudeau on Monday became the first Canadian leader to invoke the act, under pressure to quell the chaos that has spiraled from the self-styled "Freedom Convoy" demonstrations against vaccine mandates and coronavirus restrictions.

The law, passed in 1988, will give police "more tools" to bring order to areas where public assemblies "constitute illegal and dangerous activities," he said. Financial institutions, meanwhile, will get sweeping powers to halt the flow of funding to the Freedom Convoy protests.

Critics of Trudeau's move quickly spoke out against the Liberal government. The nonprofit Canadian Civil Liberties Association said using the law, which gives the federal government broad powers, such as the authority to freeze financial accounts without court orders, was unjustified. "Emergency legislation should not be normalized. It threatens our democracy and our civil liberties," it said in a statement.

The protests that began with truckers in Ottawa in late January have rippled across the country, choking off several U.S.-Canada border crossings, and inspiring protests against pandemic restrictions across the world. The Ambassador Bridge blockade lasted nearly a week, disrupting U.S. supply chains and millions of dollars in trade.

Near a partially blockaded crossing in Coutts, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Monday night, two people were arrested after a truck nearly barreled through a checkpoint, swerving at the last minute. Earlier, authorities announced the arrest of 11 people there and the seizure of guns, body armor and a "large quantity of ammunition."

At the Surrey crossing, a police official told local media outlets, officers were trying "to ensure that we can reopen all critical infrastructure," while anti-mandate protesters who camped nearby stood their ground. Police arrested more than a dozen people in Surrey overnight near the border crossing, a broadcaster in the province, Global BC, reported.

"This has gone on for far too long. ... It's time for people to go home," Trudeau said when he declared the emergency measures. He pledged they would be time-limited and geographically targeted, adding that they were not being used to deploy the military. Ottawa's police chief has said military aid might be necessary.

Shannon Stubbs, a Conservative lawmaker who called Trudeau's move a "serious blow to individual liberties," said her party intended to debate it in Parliament. While the emergency declaration went into effect immediately, it must still get confirmation in parliament within seven sitting days.

In Manitoba, where protesters had clogged roads linking to North Dakota, the premier, Heather Stefanson, said the legislation should be applied proportionally, "in locations where it is truly needed." While critical of disruptions at the U.S.-Canada border, Stefanson said law enforcement officials in her province were satisfied they had enough tools to maintain control.

Yet Ontario Premier Doug Ford welcomed action to stamp out unrest in his province, home to the nation's capital, Ottawa, where protests against mandates and the Trudeau government have paralyzed daily life. In an announcement on Ontario's lifting of restrictions, Ford also stressed the end of vaccine pass requirements in two weeks was not in response to the demonstrations.

Chrystia Freeland, Canada's deputy prime minister and finance minister, listed steps such as expanding money laundering and anti-terrorism powers that would seek to cut off financing to the protests, including

from online crowdfunding. “Your corporate accounts will be frozen,” she said. “ ... Send your semitrailers home.”

The announcement on the emergency powers followed weeks in which demonstrators in big rigs and other vehicles jammed streets in Ottawa, snarling traffic and forcing businesses to shut down. Solidarity protests spread to several U.S.-Canada border crossings, with people remaining despite threats of fines, prison time and the loss of their driver’s licenses.

Baffled by the Chaos in Canada? So Are Canadians.

New York Times, Catherine Porter, 14 February 2022

It seemed a classically Canadian moment in a scene otherwise torn from the book of Trump America.

Between the intersection transformed into a mosh pit and the graceful Parliament buildings cluttered with “fake news,” “the Great Resist” and “Covid red pill” signs, a middle-aged man named Johnny Rowe perched on a median last weekend with an amplifier and a simple greeting.

“Welcome to Ottawa,” he called out to the hordes streaming down the middle of the street, many hollering “freedom.” “Thank you for coming.”

If the outside world is baffled by the scenes unfolding in the streets of Canada, so are many Canadians. They are dumbfounded, perhaps none more so than the government officials who have stood by largely slack-jawed as giant trucks stake out ground in the normally placid capital, shaking and honking at night as people cheer and dance, neighbors be damned.

As demonstrations kept flaring, the government on Monday invoked the Emergencies Act, which greatly increases the government’s power to crack down on protest, and in Alberta the police arrested 11 people and seized a large cache of weapons. Earlier, traffic resumed over the Ambassador Bridge, a major international route blockaded for a week, and officials announced that they were lifting some contentious vaccine pass requirements.

The chaos of recent weeks has left many wondering if Canada is witnessing the birth of a political alt-right, or if it is a pandemic-induced tantrum that, once exhausted, will curl itself asleep, leaving behind a country bewildered but essentially unchanged. It could also be, some argue, that the so-called freedom convoy is not an aberration at all but a mirror to an integral part of the country that doesn’t fit the stereotype, and so is ignored.

The unrest seems a rebuff to the cherished mythology imposed on Canada’s citizens from abroad and held by many Canadians themselves as moderate, rule-following, levelheaded — and just plain nice.

“It feels like a national nervous breakdown,” said Susan Delacourt, a veteran Canadian political columnist from Ottawa who like many of her fellow citizens is wondering what exactly is happening to her country right now.

Start with the pervasive slogan of the unrest, scrawled across trucks, hats, shirt and flags, an epithet startlingly vulgar by Canadian standards that urges Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to go away. Some say he should be not just deposed but imprisoned over the vaccine regulations governments in Canada have passed.

The anger is new. Over the past two years of public health crisis, Canadians have followed their classic playbook. Even right-leaning provincial governments dutifully took their lead, for the most part, from public health experts, passing strict pandemic rules that citizens then followed.

While there have been some mask protests, more outrage was directed at local governments for not doing more to protect their citizens, and at politicians who broke the rules. Wearing a mask, and getting the vaccine, was deemed a basic act of civic solidarity. Canada has one of the highest rates in the world, with more than 83 percent of the population over the age of 5 having received at least two vaccine doses.

"Let's take care of each other in this time of need, Canada," Mr. Trudeau tweeted in March 2020, days after his wife showed symptoms and he became the first G7 leader to self-isolate. "Because that's really who we are."

Maybe it is because Canada, unlike the neighbor that overshadows it, was born not from revolution but from negotiation that its approach to rebellion now seems more than a little unconventional, even quirky. But one thing is clear: The members of the so-called freedom convoy are not bellowing "compromise" or "care for one another."

The streets of downtown Ottawa echo with chants and slogans steeped in the language of the American Revolution, right down to the Don't Tread on Me pennants. "Freedom," yells a man in a red mask waving a Canadian flag. "Freedom," comes the ardent reply. Though the flag, it should be noted, was held aloft in a quintessentially Canadian fashion, attached to a hockey stick.

The repeated invocation of liberty is just one reason — along with the American, Confederate and Trump flags spotted in the mix — many believe the unrest is essentially a U.S. import.

For two years, Canadians have been largely stuck at home, and many have spent more time in front of the screen than ever. As they did, they absorbed the American culture war being played out from Fox News to Breitbart, and Trumpian ideas took root in Canada, said Gerald Butts, a longtime friend of Mr. Trudeau's and his former top political aide.

It was not just ideas.

Right-wing activists in the United States and elsewhere have lent more than moral support to their new kindred spirits in Canada. They are opening their wallets. At least some of the money that has allowed the protesters to keep their trucks fueled and cover other expenses has flowed in from untraceable sources on crowdfunding platforms and cryptocurrencies.

Canadian political veterans have taken note.

"We ran the longest federal election campaign in history in 2015, and we spent \$42 million, right?" said Mr. Butts.

By comparison, in just a few weeks, the truckers raised about a quarter of that.

"One of the most concerning things about this movement," Mr. Butts said, "is it's shown how easy it is to pour millions of dollars of dark money into Canadian politics."

The question now is how might that play out in the months and years ahead.

Traditionally, Canadian politics is a fight for the center, not for the fringes of the ideological spectrum. Political analysts point out that the far-right People's Party of Canada, whose leader, Maxime Bernier, is a champion of the trucker protest, did not win a single seat in last year's parliamentary election.

But, populism isn't totally alien to the country, points out Janice Stein, a political science professor at the University of Toronto. A populist, the brother of the Ontario Premier Doug Ford, was once mayor of the country's biggest city, Toronto, and for years, the Reform party rallied around a sense of Western alienation and socially conservative values.

"There's a worrying tendency in Canada to define everything pushing against our founding myth as an import from the United States," Ms. Stein said. "We have mythologized our niceness: 'We are not polarized like France and Britain, and the only major democratic country in which the center has held is Canada, and that's because we're so nice and so caring to each other.'"

Canadian politics may in fact be more genteel than in many other places, but not because Canadians are innately kinder. That has just become a lot clearer.

"This is a myth-busting moment," Ms. Stein said.

Sooner or later, the trucks will depart, but will the movement the prime minister dismissed as a "small fringe minority" continue to grow? Some have their doubts.

"This is a one-off political expression," said Paul Summerville, co-author of the book "Reclaiming Populism," which argues that Canada's strong socialized medicine and affordable education system has given the country a sense of fairness and equal opportunity, inoculating it against populism.

"People are tired, they are angry," said Mr. Summerville, a former investment banker in Victoria, British Columbia. "This is a very specific moment that has to do with people feeling very uncomfortable for the last two years, because of the pandemic."

The unrest has infuriated many Ottawa residents, who have led counterprotests against what they view as an intimidating occupation of their city. But they have also drawn huge crowds of supporters, particularly on the weekends, when the downtown has been turned into what feels like a raucous tailgate party, alternative news convention and brewing witch hunt, all at the same time.

Strangers stop for impromptu conversations, hug and beam at one another, smiling widely — which after two years of mask wearing offers an emotional balm. One woman paraded the streets with a sign exhorting people to show her their teeth.

It does not take long to hear stories of personal suffering, and to understand why an ordinarily rule-abiding people might decide that a little rebellion is called for.

"Every single one of these people, has been catastrophically hurt," said Mr. Rowe, the protester, lowering his megaphone for a moment. A Bikram Yoga instructor from the city of Kingston, two hours away, Mr. Rowe listed his losses over the past two years, tears brimming in his eyes: his home, his business and half of his retirement savings. And then there was the death of his brother-in-law.

"The suffering has gotten to a level where they have nothing to lose," he said.

Compared with many countries, Canada was let off easy by Covid, with far fewer deaths per capita than the United States. But it came at a heavy cost.

Restrictions have been heavy and long. Almost two years after the pandemic hit Canada, the country remains in various stages of lockdown, with indoor dining banned in the country's two largest provinces, Ontario and Quebec, until only recently. Residents of old-age homes were locked in for the better part of a year across the country. Students in Ontario missed more in-class learning than anywhere in North America, local newspapers state.

Recent polls show that most Canadians disagree with the tactics of the so-called freedom convoy, and worry that the country's democracy is being threatened. But, many feel sympathy for protesters, particularly younger Canadians.

"Imagine storm clouds on horizon," said Darrell Bricker, chief executive of the polling company Ipsos Public Affairs. "That has to discharge somewhere. This is part of the discharge."

Among those people watching the scenes unfold in Ottawa is one of the city's two poet laureates, Albert Dumont. An Algonquin elder, Mr. Dumont rejects not just the protesters' notion of freedom, given its effect on local residents, but the whole idea that Canada was ever particularly nice, or even tolerant.

"My dad didn't get to vote until 1960 — that's not long ago," he said. "There was a time when Canada was ugly and very cruel to Indigenous people."

Canada's Trudeau Invokes Emergency Powers to Address Trucker Protests

Wall Street Journal, Paul Vieira and Kim Mackrael, 14 February 2022

In a highly unusual move, the Canadian government on Monday invoked a series of emergency powers that include limits on public gatherings in a bid to end disruptive demonstrations in the capital city and along the Canada-U.S. border.

The measures, announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, represent one of the most striking responses by a Western government against protests by those opposing Covid-19 vaccine mandates and social restrictions in response to the pandemic, and immediately drew fire from some Canadian leaders and civil-liberties groups.

The government also said Monday the country was extending laws targeting money laundering to capture transactions, including cryptocurrencies, on crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe.

"It is now clear that there are serious challenges to law-enforcement's ability to effectively enforce the law," Mr. Trudeau said at a news conference. "We cannot and will not allow illegal and dangerous activities to continue."

Mr. Trudeau's move to invoke emergency powers comes after police on Sunday reopened access to the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit with the city of Windsor, Ontario. Up until late Sunday night, demonstrators had blocked incoming U.S. vehicles from entering Canada for roughly a week.

Officials said these extraordinary measures were necessary because of the damage done to the economy with the blocking of U.S.-Canada trade. Further, "we've seen intimidation, harassment and expressions of hate," said Canada's Public Safety Minister, Marco Mendicino, adding scenes in Ottawa have at times represented lawlessness. "That is one of the reasons why we've had to take [this] very careful and deliberate step."

The prime minister's decision to invoke the special powers faced sharp criticism Monday from both rights groups and some provincial leaders.

Quebec Premier François Legault said he can understand the sentiment that "enough is enough" in Ottawa but believes the planned measures aren't needed in his province and could be damaging.

"We really need not to put oil on the fire," Mr. Legault said.

An earlier and much more restrictive version of the legislation, called the War Measures Act, was invoked three times in Canadian history. Its most controversial use was in 1970, when Mr. Trudeau's father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, used the act when he was prime minister to squelch a militant separatist group in Quebec, known as the FLQ.

The government said its invocation of the act doesn't undermine Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which came into force in 1982 and protects rights considered essential to preserving a free and democratic society. However, there is a debate about whether the government is overstepping in applying the act to those participating in protests and blockades.

Leah West, a national-security expert at Carleton University in Ottawa, said it is unclear that the current protests—in the capital, Ottawa, and at two border crossings in western Canada—meet the legal threshold of a national emergency. Invoking the Emergencies Act if that threshold isn't met, she said, "sets a precedent that unpopular dissent against the government is enough for the government to take these extraordinary powers into its own hands."

Prof. West said Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects civil liberties, but protection isn't absolute. She said that means rights can be limited and still comply with the Charter.

The measures come into effect immediately but Mr. Trudeau must present his reasoning for using the act to parliament and hold a vote within seven days. The leader of the New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, said he would support the move, thereby giving the incumbent Liberals enough votes to ensure passage.

Mr. Trudeau said the military wasn't being deployed against the protesters, and the government wasn't suspending rights guaranteed under the country's constitution. He added the measures, which local police forces would enforce, are meant to target specific regions in the country where protests are judged to pose a threat. Mr. Trudeau described the demonstration in Ottawa, now in its 18th day, as "an illegal occupation."

City of Ottawa officials say the local police force doesn't have the necessary resources to quell the demonstration, and have asked the federal government for an additional 1,800 officers.

Despite the government's hard line, protesters believe their message is resonating.

"Any government that's ever taken freedoms away from people never gives them back," said Tyler Chiliak, a farmer from western Canada who has been in Ottawa since the Covid-19 protests began.

When he isn't out commiserating with fellow protesters, he is keeping warm inside his cargo trailer, where he cooks food, keeps bottled water and sleeps.

"It may take a while before we accomplish our goals so to speak. But whether they like it or not things are happening because we are here," Mr. Chiliak said.

Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland also said the country was extending laws targeting money laundering. All crowdfunding platforms and the payment-service provider they use must register with Canada's financial-intelligence agency, and report what they deem as large, suspicious donations. The recent protests had success in raising money on GoFundMe.

"This will help mitigate the risk that these platforms receive illicit funds," Ms. Freeland said. "We know these platforms are being used to support illegal blockades and illegal activity which is damaging the Canadian economy."

Officials also said some essential service providers—for example, tow-truck operators—could be compelled to render services to remove obstructive vehicles, for example those parked in front of Canada's parliament and other downtown streets. City of Ottawa officials say tow-truck operators have declined city requests to have some of the protesters' trucks, parked on a street in front of the legislature, removed from the main demonstration zone.

Police in Alberta said on Monday they seized a cache of firearms, including handguns and 13 long guns, and a large quantity of ammunition in an early-morning raid targeting three trailers that are part of a blockade disrupting cross-border traffic between Coutts, Alberta, and Montana. Police added they arrested and detained 11 individuals. "The group was said to have a willingness to use force against the police if any attempts were made to disrupt the blockade," the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said.

Also on Monday, Canada's most populous province, Ontario, said it would drop on March 1 requirements that citizens need to be fully vaccinated to enter certain public settings such as restaurants, bars and gyms. Ontario would join Alberta and Saskatchewan, among other provinces, in beginning to relax rules regarding Covid-19 vaccinations and social restrictions. Ontario Premier Doug Ford said the relaxing of rules wasn't connected to the protests popping up across the country. "This plan was in place long before the protests," he told reporters.

Mr. Trudeau and Liberal government officials have said they have no intention of loosening vaccine mandates as they pertain to the federal workforce, travel on airplanes and long-distance passenger rail, and essential workers—such as truck drivers—who cross the U.S.-Canada border.

Cornell Wiebe, a protester who was at the Ambassador Bridge blockade since the beginning, called the protest a success, given how much attention it received.

“We held the line until the government was going to remove the peaceful people with a use of force,” he said in an email. “The whole point was to get international news coverage to expose the government.”

The reopening of the 1.6-mile Ambassador Bridge brought relief to North American factories, as the blockade disrupted the continental supply-chain network and forced some companies to curtail production because they couldn’t get parts delivered.

Matt Moroun, chairman of the company that operates the Ambassador Bridge, said Monday that officials in the U.S. and Canada need to develop more robust plans that protect border crossings “and ensure that this kind of disruption to critical infrastructure will never happen again.”

Fact check: Canadian government didn't place rock-filled bins to incite violence at trucker protest
USA Today, McKenzie Sadeghi, 14 February 2022

The claim: The Canadian government planted dumpsters full of rocks to incite violence during COVID-19 demonstrations

During major protests, rumors sometimes surface about bricks being deliberately placed by law enforcement to incite violence.

The baseless conspiracy theory emerged in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in anticipation of the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict, and similar false claims about pallets of bricks made the rounds during the 2020 election and nationwide demonstrations against racial injustice and police brutality.

The latest iteration of the claim targets the Canadian trucker demonstration against COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

“Canadian Government leaving dumpsters full of rocks in the streets in the hopes that the protests will turn violent,” reads a Feb. 9 Facebook post from the page Libertarian Candidates that accumulated more than 800 reactions in less than three days.

Accompanying the text is an image of a large, red container filled with rocks and rubble. A caption over the photo says, “If anything happens cause of those rocks, its (sic) 100% orchestrated.” The photo was captured from a Feb. 7 TikTok video that generated more 39,000 likes.

The claim follows Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson's state of emergency declaration, which followed reports of violence and disruptive behavior amid the ongoing demonstrations.

But rocks were not placed by the government to incite violence. The image circulating online shows a container filled with rubble from a construction project that had been taking place long before the demonstrations started, USA TODAY confirmed..

Container was for a construction project

A logo seen on the container reveals it belongs to Mr. Dumpster, a bin rental company located in Ottawa. One of the owners, Nicolas Benson, told USA TODAY that the bin wasn’t “just dropped off” for the demonstrations and there isn’t anything malicious about it.

He said a contractor rented a bin for a construction project that has been taking place since the summer of 2021 in downtown Ottawa, and the bin was removed from the location the same day the TikTok video went viral.

The company also took to social media to address the claims.

"The dumpster is being rented and used for concrete repair work that has been ongoing for over a year by a reputable contractor," reads a Feb. 7 Facebook post from Mr. Dumpster. "The use is strictly for the contractor and in no way intended for any malicious acts. As a precaution, the dumpster was removed Sunday afternoon as requested by the contractor."

The construction took place outside the Constitution Square office complex near Canada's Parliament Hill, where many of the demonstrations have been taking place. On Feb. 10, a reporter with AFP visited the site and confirmed the dumpster was no longer there.

Fact check: No evidence Canadian prime minister fled country amid trucker protests

USA TODAY reached out to the city of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service for additional comment.

Our rating: False

Based on our research, we rate FALSE the claim that the Canadian government planted dumpsters full of rocks to incite violence during COVID-19 demonstrations. The company that owns the container said it was being used by a contractor for a construction project that had been taking place since 2021. The container has since been removed.

Canada's trucker blockade is a right-wing fantasy made real

MSNBC, Ryan Cooper, 14 February 2022

On Sunday, the Ambassador Bridge on the U.S.-Canada border between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, was reopened after a weeklong protest, in which a handful of right-wing fanatics had been blocking the bridge and holding up some \$355 million in goods in protest against a vaccine mandate for the trucking industry.

Protesters had taken over another nearby crossing into Sarnia, and one in Alberta, as well. As a result, Ford, Toyota, Stellantis and Honda idled some six Canadian car factories for several days, with knock-on effects creating even more snarls in supply chains. With one of Canada's major cities paralyzed, and three key economic arteries between it and the world's mightiest empire clogged, a severe shortage of new cars has been jacking up inflation and thus tanking President Joe Biden's approval rating.

But these protests are just the visible part of a larger right-wing occupation movement, and indicative of a worrying anti-government trend. And equally as worrying is how law enforcement on both sides of the border have responded.

Ottawa was terrorized for nearly two weeks by a few hundred protesters honking horns day and night, waving Nazi flags, harassing passers-by, and in one case, allegedly attempting to burn down an apartment building.

Canadian police finally cleared off Ambassador Bridge after the blockaders defied a court order to disperse. But throughout this process, law enforcement in both countries were astoundingly timid in their responses. Canadian cops had been walking on eggshells; we "are taking a diplomatic approach," the Windsor police chief told reporters. Meanwhile, Ottawa police tried to coax the city occupiers out by cutting off their fuel and getting an injunction against honking horns instead of arresting them. As for U.S. law enforcement, there was no sign that the country's gigantic security apparatus would crack down on the demonstration.

These events show that when law enforcement is genuinely needed to quash a far-right insurgency, it is timid and reluctant to do anything — a dangerous precedent to set indeed. Because these blockades are very likely just the start.

To be clear, as I have previously written, in the U.S. there definitely is far too much money spent on cops and courts, far too little spent on welfare benefits and social services that actually prevent crime, and far too little accountability for abusive cops. American police and jails are de facto charged with warehousing the social dysfunction caused by extreme inequality rather than actually doing much to control crime. But as we saw in Ottawa and Windsor, a democratic government does at least need some kind of armed service just in case some deranged violent minority tries to impose its will by force.

The problem in the United States, and it seems in Canada as well, is that police simply can't bring themselves to believe that far-right groups can be "real" criminals." When faced with right-wing lawbreakers, police (who are overwhelmingly conservative) tend to either sympathize with their demands or helplessly legitimize their grievances. The law enforcement response to the situation along the Canadian border smacked strongly of what happened with the Capitol Police before and during the attempted putsch on Jan. 6, when the agency brass failed to mobilize sufficiently despite obvious warnings and some of the officers fraternized with the rioters (though most of the rank-and-file did do their jobs as best they could, to be fair).

It scarcely needs to be mentioned that police do not grant such deference to nonwhite or leftist protest movements. For instance, when Native American groups temporarily blocked a key Canadian highway some years back over a land dispute, heavily armed SWAT teams were ready within hours to storm in and arrest them, which, unsurprisingly, turned out to not be necessary as they opened the road up after one day. In the U.S., Black Lives Matter protests that were almost entirely peaceful were constantly confronted with psychotic police violence. Black activists generally got the worst of it, but a substantial number of white people were savagely attacked as well. The "J20" group that protested Donald Trump's inauguration were persecuted for years by the Department of Justice with ludicrous charges carrying decades in prison (most of which were eventually dropped).

It's important to be clear about what the goals were here. These "truckers" (many of the participants are not actually truck drivers) are not Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. Their main explicit demand was an end to vaccine mandates and mask rules. They want this monstrous goal, which as a matter of basic biology would make the pandemic worse, imposed over the wishes of a large majority of Americans and a huge majority of Canadians. The extreme right can't win an election, so they are effectively taking the auto industry and the global supply chain hostage to get what they want.

It would be hard to imagine a more legitimate use of state authority to resist this demand — not with a massacre, of course, but with firm action to reopen traffic and take the culprits into custody. Not only would it be protecting the health of the public (including Canadian truck drivers themselves, who are overwhelmingly vaccinated and not participating in the protest) and reopening the flow of vital goods and services, but it also would set a salutary example. If these groups get away with this, the far right will be emboldened, and will very likely attempt similar attacks and protests again and again all over Canada and the U.S. Fox News is already trying its level best to whip up an identical "convoy" to disrupt American highways and cities.

But for that to avoid more disruptions like this, law enforcement is apparently going to need some serious changes. If these agencies can't protect society from the deranged aggression of a right-wing fringe, they need to be rebuilt from the ground up so they can.

Canada tries to block funding for illegal border protests against Covid-19 rules with sweeping new financial measures

CNN, Kelly McCleary and Holly Yan, 15 February 2022

Canada has invoked the country's Emergencies Act for the first time ever in an attempt to sever financial support for protesters' costly blockades at US border crossings over Covid-19 mandates.

Financial institutions will now have the power to freeze personal or corporate accounts they believe are being used to fund the illegal protests, Freeland said.

"This is about following the money. This is about stopping the financing of these illegal blockades," Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland said Monday.

The government will use the law to target those funding protesters who have blocked border crossings -- resulting in economic losses of \$500 million a day, she said.

While the crucial Ambassador Bridge between Ontario and Michigan has reopened after a weeklong blockade, protesters are still obstructing crossings between Emerson, Manitoba, and Pembina, North Dakota, as well as between Coutts, Alberta, and Sweet Grass, Montana.

On Monday, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police seized long guns, body armor and high-capacity magazines tied to a group within the protest in Coutts, it said.

And now the US is closely coordinating with Canada to share information on people who might try to participate in blockades, Canada's Minister of Public Safety Marco Mendicino told CNN.

"The United States is monitoring carefully the blockades in Canada and what we agreed is that we could continue to share information and to advance the very close collaboration that exists between our CBSA (Canada Border Services Agency) and the (US) Customs and Border Patrol, so that we can identify any potential individuals who may be trying to cross the border to advance illegal blockades in Canada," Mendicino said.

The public safety minister has been in regular contact with US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas he said.

"Given the current moment that we're in ... we're obviously going to do what we can to bring about the end of these illegal blockades," Mendicino said.

An unprecedented move

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he was invoking the Emergencies Act for the first time since it became law in 1988 to blunt the impact of the "Freedom Convoy" protests.

The rallies began when a group of truckers moved into Canada's capital on January 29, clogging streets surrounding the Parliament building and elsewhere in downtown Ottawa to protest a new mandate requiring them to be fully vaccinated when crossing the Canadian-US border or face a two-week quarantine.

They have been joined in Ottawa and at border stops and cities across the nation by others who want an end to other Covid-19 mitigation measures, like mask mandates, lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings.

But the protesters are a vocal minority. About 4 in every 5 Canadians fully vaccinated and nearly 90% of Canada's truckers fully vaccinated and eligible to cross the border, the government said.

"These illegal barricades are doing great damage to Canada's economy and to our reputation as a reliable trading partner," Freeland said.

The blockade at the Ambassador Bridge, which was cleared Sunday, impacted about \$390 million worth of commerce a day, the minister said. The combined impact of blockades at border crossings, including those in Alberta and Manitoba, has been \$500 million each day, Freeland said.

"These costs are real. They threaten businesses, big and small," Freeland said. "The Canadian economy needs (truckers) to be doing legitimate work, not to be illegally making us all poorer."

In addition to allowing financial institutions to freeze accounts suspected of funding illegal protests, Canada is also requiring crowdfunding sites and payment service providers used by protesters to register with the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada and report any large suspicious donations -- including digital payments and with cryptocurrencies. Some sites have raised millions of dollars.

While the Emergencies Act allows for the use of the military, the government will not take that step, Trudeau said Monday.

The measure can also temporarily suspend citizens' rights to free movement or assembly, but Trudeau said the government is not overriding the Charter of Rights and Freedoms -- a part of the Canadian Constitution that lays out "rights and freedoms that Canadians believe are necessary in a free and democratic society," according to a Canadian government website.

"We are not preventing people from exercising their right to protest legally," Trudeau said. The law will be limited geographically, in scope and in time, he noted.

Ambassador Bridge owner issues 'call to action'

The reopening of the Ambassador Bridge was "a win for Michigan's working families who are just trying to do their jobs and for businesses who can get back to shipping their products and produce," Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said in a statement Monday.

The bridge is the busiest land border crossing in North America, linking Detroit and Windsor, Ontario. It carries nearly 30% of annual trade between Michigan and Canada, Whitmer said.

That blockade, which caused supply chain issues for automakers on both sides of the border, ended when Canadian authorities cleared pedestrians and vehicles that had been blocking access to the bridge over the weekend.

Whitmer thanked US and Canadian border officials and business leaders for their work in resolving the ordeal and said it was important to "ensure that this does not happen again."

The company that owns the bridge echoed that sentiment and issued a "call to action" to prevent future closures.

"We must join together to come up with an actionable plan that will protect and secure all border crossings in the Canada/U.S. corridor and ensure that this kind of disruption to critical infrastructure will never happen again," said Matt Moroun, the chairman of Detroit International Bridge Company. "They are critical pipelines that supply the goods we need to keep our factories going, our neighbors working and our economies thriving."

But the standoff at the Coutts border crossing in Alberta took a turn Monday.

Eleven people were arrested, and authorities seized 13 long guns, handguns, multiple sets of body armor, a machete and a large quantity of ammunition and high-capacity magazines connected to a small, organized group within a larger protest at the crossing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police said.

"The group was said to have a willingness to use force against the police if any attempts were made to disrupt the blockade," the statement said. "This resulted in an immediate and complex investigation to determine the extent of the threat and criminal organization."

Ontario to loosen pandemic restrictions

While protests continue in parts of Canada, Ontario Premier Doug Ford said he plans to lift the province's vaccine passport requirements March 1 if hospitalization rates continue to improve.

Capacity limits will also be eliminated in all indoor public settings starting March 1, though masking requirements in Ontario will remain in effect "just a little bit longer," Ford said Monday.

But the loosening of pandemic restrictions have nothing to do with the protests, the premier said. "Let me be very clear: We're moving in this direction because it's safe to do so," Ford said Monday. "Today's announcement is not because of what's happening in Ottawa or Windsor, but despite it."

He also vowed "serious consequences" for those who cause disruptions while demonstrating in Ontario. "To those who are still there, to those of you who are there with the sole objective of causing disruption and chaos, there'll be serious consequences for this lawless activity," Ford said.

"We will continue to raise the consequences against those who are holding millions of jobs and people hostage."

Canada PM Justin Trudeau slammed for invoking emergency powers to stop protests

NY Post, Yaron Steinbuch, 15 February 2022

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been criticized by several civil liberties groups and politicians for invoking emergency powers to stop the protests across the country against COVID-19 restrictions.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has argued that the protests, which have snarled traffic in cities and at the border, did not meet the standard to have invoked the Emergencies Act.

"The Emergencies Act can only be invoked when a situation 'seriously threatens the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada' & when the situation 'cannot be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada,'" it said on Twitter.

"Governments regularly deal with difficult situations, and do so using powers granted to them by democratically elected representatives. Emergency legislation should not be normalized. It threatens our democracy and our civil liberties," the association added.

Trudeau on Monday invoked Canada's Emergencies Act, which gives the federal government broad powers to restore order.

It threatened to tow away vehicles to keep essential services running; freeze truckers' personal and corporate bank accounts; and take further action to strike at their livelihoods and the sources of their financial support.

"Consider yourselves warned," Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland told the "Freedom Convoy" members.

"If your truck is used in these blockades, your corporate accounts will be frozen. The insurance on your vehicle will be suspended. Send your rigs home," Freeland added.

Some groups have approved of the measure, calling it "responsible" and "a good strategy," but others have condemned it as government overreach, Fox News reported.

Lori Williams, a politics professor at Mount Royal University in Calgary told Reuters that "there's the danger this could create more problems," adding: "That's why this has to be done with the cooperation of premiers and if they don't want help, then the federal government needs to hang back."

"It has to be very targeted, very strategic and very restrained, because these are enormous powers that are being implemented," she said.

Leah West, an assistant professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, said: "The federal government must consult with provinces and Cabinet must believe the protests rise to the level of a national emergency.

"Can it truly be said the security of Canada is threatened by largely non-violent protests? Certainly, our sovereignty and territorial integrity are not at risk," she said in a tweet.

Quebec Premier Francois Legault said that imposing the act risks putting "oil on the fire" by further polarizing the population and argued that local authorities in the province have the situation under control.

"I was very clear with the Prime Minister that the federal emergency act must not apply in Quebec. I think we don't need it. I think that at this moment it would not help the social climate," Legault told reporters, according to Reuters.

"There's a lot of pressure right now and I think we have to be careful. So it's about time we put all Quebecers together. But I can understand that enough is enough in Ottawa. You can protest but you cannot do what they are doing since two weeks," he said.

In Manitoba, Premier Heather Stefanson said she believed that "the sweeping effects and signals associated with the never-before-used Emergencies Act are not constructive here in Manitoba, where caution must be taken against overreach and unintended negative consequences.

"While the situation is very different in Ontario, this ultimate federal legislation should only be considered on a measured and proportional basis, in locations where it is truly needed," Stefanson told reporters.

Meanwhile, Ontario Premier Doug Ford said: "I'll support the federal government and any proposals they have to bring law and order back to our province, to make sure we stabilize our businesses and trade around the world as the world is watching us right now, wondering if it's a stable environment to open up businesses and expand businesses.

"These occupiers, they're doing the total opposite what they say they're there to do. They're hurting hundreds of thousands of families, millions of jobs across the province," he told reporters.

Goldy Hyder, CEO of the Business Council of Canada told Reuters: "We recognize the gravity of the federal government's decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. Having called on the federal government to show national leadership, we welcome this as a step toward ending illegal blockades across the country and upholding the rule of law."

Phil Boyle, associate chair for legal studies at the University of Waterloo called it "an interesting strategic move there to go after the money. That seems appropriate.

"One of the things that worked in Windsor, with the Ambassador Bridge, was the threat of taking away their licenses. If your livelihood depends on license, you're going to think twice before putting that at risk. So that might very well work with the case of Ottawa," Boyle told Reuters.

"No doubt there will be some litigation to come of this, considering it's never been done before... If these emergency measures are targeted within a particular province... Trudeau would only do it if he had the relevant province on board. Maybe that would lessen the potential for litigation," he said.

"I wonder, how does this Federal emergencies order square with the (Ontario) provincial emergencies order that was just ordered on Friday? I don't think we've ever been in a situation where both the provincial and the federal government have, at the same time, invoked extraordinary emergency measures," Boyle added.

For more than two weeks, hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters in trucks and other vehicles have clogged the streets of Ottawa, the capital, and besieged Parliament Hill, railing against vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 precautions and condemning Trudeau's Liberal government.

Vigils planned at Canadian embassies in US to protest imprisonment of pastor who preached to Freedom Convoy

Fox News, Jon Brown, 15 February 2022

Supporters of a Canadian pastor who has spent the past week in a maximum-security Calgary prison after speaking to members of the Freedom Convoy have organized vigils at various Canadian consulates in the United States to protest his treatment Tuesday.

Pastor Artur Pawlowski, who remains in solitary confinement for 23 hours per day at the Calgary Remand Centre, according to his lawyer, was arrested last Monday after he spoke to members of the trucker blockade along the U.S.-Canada border in Coutts, Alberta, on Feb. 4.

During a 20-minute speech to the truckers, the pastor urged them to "hold the line" against government overreach without resorting to violence. They had reportedly reached an agreement to abandon their blockade of the U.S. border and travel to Edmonton until changing their minds following Pawlowski's address.

Pawlowski also recounted to them the parallels he sees between the Freedom Convoy and Poland's Solidarity movement in the 1980s that ultimately led to the liberation of his native country, despite a crackdown from its communist government.

'We don't fight with guns and swords'

Pawlowski's most recent arrest marked his fifth since the pandemic. He first made international headlines last April when he threw armed police out of his sanctuary when they attempted to inspect it for COVID-19 compliance during an Easter service.

After continuing to hold church services in defiance of a court order, he has faced repeated dramatic arrests, including in the middle of a busy highway and on the tarmac of the Calgary airport.

Last summer, he conducted a speaking tour throughout the United States, meeting with lawmakers and warning large audiences that Western governments increasingly resemble the communist regime in Poland he fled as a young man.

Pawlowski was preparing to return to the border to officiate a church service and speak to the truckers there last week when police apprehended him, according to Pawlowski's son, Nathaniel Pawlowski.

"There was an undercover police van, unmarked vehicles staking out our house, we're guessing, for many, many hours, because they were outside for a long time," he told Fox News Digital.

Pawlowski was ultimately charged on one count of mischief over \$5,000, one count of aiding in blocking critical infrastructure and one count of breaching a bail condition for "not keeping the peace," which was related to probation conditions under which he was placed in October after being arrested following his U.S. tour.

Pawlowski remains imprisoned after being denied bail during a hearing last Wednesday, when a Crown prosecutor alleged that the pastor's speech to the truckers was an "overt threat to violence," according to the CBC.

Pawlowski explicitly told the truckers twice not to resort to violence during their protests, according to video of his remarks.

"May God help us all, because we don't fight with guns and swords," he said. "We don't fight with Tasers and the police vehicles. We don't. We just want to go back and work hard and achieve something and provide for our families. We just want to be left alone."

"Again, I'm not talking about violence, swords and guns all that stuff," he later told the truckers. "You have the most powerful wings ever. Who can move 1,000 trucks? Who can move 10,000 truckers with 100,000 supporters?"

Pawlowski faces another bail hearing Wednesday.

'We're at a pivotal point in history'

Nathaniel Pawlowski said his father has been treated poorly in prison but that he remains undeterred and has undertaken two fasts based on biblical tradition.

"He finished a three-day fast based on the story of Esther, where she fasted so that the enemy would be exposed," he said. "And now he's doing a 21-day 'Daniel fast,' which is basically light food, no meat. It's eating vegetables so that he would get an answer from God."

Peaceful prayer protests against Pawlowski's imprisonment are being planned Tuesday at the Canadian consulates in New York City, Seattle, Los Angeles, Chicago and Las Vegas.

Cindy Chafian, who is the executive director of Firebrand Action and Media, which is organizing the vigils, said she remains unsure what the turnout at the embassies will be given the short notice but that the initiative remains important.

"Regardless of what happens, we're still going to keep pushing through, because I don't think they're going to let Artur out," she said. "But the goal is to raise awareness to what's happening to Artur. It's not just what's going on since COVID. They've been targeting him for many, many years. He is not a friendly person in the government's eyes because he speaks the truth, and they don't like that."

The organization is also readying signatures for a letter to send to Congress regarding Pawlowski's treatment.

Chafian said the initiative's goals extend beyond Pawlowski and are intended to raise international awareness regarding how other clergy in Canada have been treated since the pandemic. Churches throughout Canada have faced imprisoned pastors, locked facilities, steep fines and continued interference from government officials.

In June, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., called on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to consider adding Canada to its special watch list because of how pastors are being treated in the country.

"We're at a pivotal point in history, and if we don't stop this, we're just going to go down the deeper slide," said Chafian. "And if we don't think that it's coming here to the U.S., we're woefully mistaken."